

chapter four

Remembering

As far back as Heidi could remember there had been Fräulein Gelber. Fräulein Gelber looked after her. She was tall and thin, with hips that looked like she had a coat-hanger in her skirt, and she had dark hair pulled back and wore narrow skirts that meant she couldn't run or walk too fast.

There was Frau Mundt, who was a widow, whose hands smelt of butter. Frau Mundt looked after her sometimes, when Fräulein Gelber visited her family.

Frau Mundt wore flowered dirndls under her apron. Once she took Heidi on her knee and told her a story.

'We had no money, no work, no bread,' she said. 'Even if you had money, it was worth nothing in those days! A wheelbarrow full of money wouldn't buy you a loaf of bread.'

'We begged. It was horrible, but we had to beg just to get food to eat. The occupying troops, the French and the Belgians, took all we had. They had whips and they whipped us off the sidewalks so we had to walk in the gutter. They threw us in the mud. That is how it was then, after the Great War.

'Then it was 1932. My Willi had a motorbike. It was an old motorbike, from before the war, but sometimes we got a little petrol, and I sat on the back seat and we went to hear the Führer give a great speech. He wasn't the Führer then but it was so wonderful — thousands of people, oh, so many people cheering.

'And he told us how he wanted to be on the side of the unemployed — that was people like us, like me and Willi. He would save us, he would get us jobs, he would make Germany proud and free again, and I was cheering with everyone else while the tears ran down my cheeks.

'And that night I prayed that this great, good man would get all the votes so we could get out of need. No one else promised what he did. He was the only one who gave us hope. This good man ... and everything that he promised, he has given us.'

It was only then that Heidi realised Frau Mundt was talking about Duffi.

Duffi was the Führer. He was her father too.

No one said he was her father, of course. She never called him Vater. She called him Duffi and he hugged her whenever he visited, which wasn't often, and he brought her dolls with long blonde hair that made her cry secretly at night, because they were beautiful and she was not.

If she looked like the dolls he would have let her call him Father.

'But ... but how did she know she was his daughter if he never said?' objected Mark. 'Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt.'

Anna shook her head. 'I don't know,' she said. 'She just did know. She lived there in his house — or the house he visited sometimes, anyway, when he wasn't in Berlin — and he called her "my little girl". "How is my little girl today? Has she been good for Fräulein Gelber?" Somehow she just *knew*.'

In the mornings she did her lessons with Fräulein Gelber and in the afternoons they walked.

Fräulein Gelber knew the name of every tree and every flower, and even the names of the grasses too.

'That's a cuckoo's call!' cried Fräulein Gelber, or, 'Listen, there's a thrush.'

Sometimes they took bread down to the carp in the pool by the bridge. One of the carp was big and black

and gold. He was maybe two hundred years old said Fräulein Gelber as they threw the bread into the water for the fish. (The fish mostly ignored it, so Heidi wondered if they really liked bread at all.)

When Heidi found hedgehogs freezing that winter Fräulein Gelber let her keep them in a basket by the hearth of the stove and Heidi fed them on bread and milk.

'They will probably die anyway,' said Fräulein Gelber indulgently, but she let her look after them. The hedgehogs didn't die, and in the spring Heidi let them go in the garden. She hoped that maybe they'd remember her and come back to her sometimes. It would be good to have friends, even if they were hedgehogs. But the hedgehogs scuttled away and Heidi didn't see them again.

Heidi always wanted to walk faster than Fräulein Gelber did. Fräulein Gelber didn't even have a limp, but she never walked quite fast enough.

There were so many things that Heidi would have liked to do. She would have liked to join the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the girl's association, like Frau Mundt's eldest daughter, Lotte. Frau Mundt told her lots of stories about Lotte. Heidi would have liked to meet her, but of course she never could. Heidi never met anyone at all.

If she joined the BDM she would do sports (Heidi had to ask Frau Mundt what sports were, but they sounded fun), and folk dancing. They would all sing songs together and, sometimes, go to the movies together.

But Heidi was not allowed.

She would have liked to go to school, to play with other girls. But that was not permitted either.

But she was a lucky girl. Everybody told her she was lucky. She had such pretty things: all the pretty things a girl could want.

She had her lovely home and such good food and Fräulein Gelber to look after her, and she had Duffi, who loved her, just as he loved all his German children.

Heidi hoped that one day Duffi would tell her that of all his German children he loved her best.

An engine sounded in the distance. A rumble coming closer, closer. Mark peered out of the shelter. Surely it was too early for the bus.

It was only Johnny Talbot on his motorbike, roaring up to town. He raised his hand briefly at the kids as he passed the shelter, and Mark half raised his hand to wave.

Anna sat still with her hands in her pockets.

'What?' Mark broke off and tried to choose his words carefully. 'How could she want someone like that to love her? Someone who did such horrible things.'

'He was her father,' said Anna simply.

'But what about the concentration camps? What about all the Jews he killed and the war and how he invaded Poland and all that?'

'She didn't know,' said Anna.

'But she must have!'

Anna shook her head. 'The concentration camps were secret. I mean what they did there was secret. They were just supposed to be work camps. That's what it said in the papers. And Heidi didn't even see the papers. No one showed them to her. Only sometimes, when her father made a speech, and Fräulein Gelber would cut out his photo for her to pin on the wall.

'How would she know what was happening? She didn't even go to school so she couldn't listen to other people talk.'

'But she was there — in Hitler's house — in the middle of everything,' objected Mark.

Anna nodded slowly. 'She was in the middle of everything, but she knew less than anyone outside.'

Anna put her hands in her lap, and her face got its

story-telling look again. 'She knew there was war. People talked about the war. But no one said that it was Hitler's fault. The people in the household worked for Hitler. They thought that he was wonderful and that's what they told Heidi.

'Hitler was the leader who was going to save Germany, who would bring about The Third Reich. Germany would reign over the world and all the shame of World War One would be wiped out. Why would Heidi think any differently?'

Mark shook his head. 'But ... but she must just have KNOWN. If she'd just started to think about it all ...'

'Would you know if your parents were doing something wrong?' asked Anna softly.

'Of course I would. But they wouldn't do anything really wrong anyway.'

'Are you sure?' persisted Anna. Her eyes were bright. 'All the things your mum and dad believe in — have you ever really wondered if they are right or wrong? Or do you just think they're right because that's what your mum and dad think, so it *has* to be right?'

'Well, I ...' Mark stopped.

No, he'd never thought maybe Mum and Dad were wrong, really wrong, about something.

Something big — not just like Mum always wanting to be early and Dad barracking for Carlton even though he could see that they were losers (that's what Mum said at any rate).

But that was different. Mum and Dad weren't evil.

'It's not the same,' he said at last.

Anna shrugged.

Little Tracey drummed her feet impatiently, 'Go on with the story,' she insisted. 'PLEASE, Anna.'

Anna glanced at Mark. 'Okay,' she said.

'Sometimes, just sometimes, Heidi felt that maybe ... maybe things weren't always right.'

It was the day after her birthday party. Duffi couldn't be there — Duffi came so rarely nowadays. He had all of Germany to look after, and the war. But she had had a cake, in spite of the war, though she'd heard one of the guards mutter how much butter it had used.

It seemed other people didn't have butter or cakes like that any more.

'So there were guards?' asked Mark.

'Yes,' said Anna. 'There were always guards.'

Duffi sent a doll from Paris. It had dark hair like her own, so Heidi liked it better than her other dolls, but it still didn't have a mark on its face and anyway she was much too old for dolls.

The doll was dressed in velvet and lace. The dress had proper buttons so she undid them and took the dress off, just to see what was underneath, then put it back on again and sat the doll on the shelf above her bed with all the others and went to find Fräulein Gelber. It was time for Heidi's lessons. Fräulein Gelber had never been late before.

Fräulein Gelber was in the garden, sitting on the wrought-iron seat under the plum tree. She had a letter in her hand. She was crying. Her face was all scrunched up like a mouse's.

Heidi approached timidly. She didn't know what to do when someone cried.

'Fräulein Gelber?' she asked at last. 'What's the matter?'

Fräulein Gelber thrust her handkerchief back into her pocket and tried to make her face look normal. 'It's my brother,' she said. 'They're sending him to the Russian front. Oh, Heidi, it is insane, insane. He will die there, I know he will. We can never win this war now.'

Then suddenly she looked frightened, her eyes red in her swollen face. She looked up at Heidi as though she had remembered who she was. She tried to smile.

'I'm being so silly,' she said. 'Please forget I said that, Heidi. Please forget I said anything at all. I am

just worried for my brother — who would not be? But of course he will come back safely. Of course Germany will win the war.'

Fräulein Gelber fumbled the letter into the pocket of her jacket. 'It's time for lessons,' she said. 'You are a very lucky girl, you know that? All these wonderful things that you're learning.'

'Yes,' said Heidi. 'I know that I'm lucky.'

Anna stopped.

'Go on,' said Mark after a while.

'There was another time, another time that Heidi realised something was wrong.'

It was one of the women in the kitchen. A big woman, who came to do the scrubbing. Her bottom looked as wide as a table and she had lots of hair, bits of which stuck out in spite of being tied back.

She was crying, and the others were all comforting her.

'I didn't know,' she kept saying. 'I didn't know. They took her away. They said it was for the best, she would be cared for.'

Frau Mundt saw Heidi listening and ran across the kitchen to her, and took her hand. 'Freya isn't well. Come on, I'll take you upstairs.'

Frau Mundt led her up the stairs, away from the sobbing below.

'Frau Mundt, what's wrong with her?'

Frau Mundt hesitated. 'She has just found out that her sister is dead.'

'When did she die? In the air raids?' Even Heidi knew about the air raids.

'Not in the air raids. She has been dead, oh, six months maybe.'

'I didn't know she had a sister,' said Heidi.

'Her sister, she was not quite right. In the head you understand, not clever like other children. So they took her to a special school. And now Freya has found out her sister is dead. No one told them she had died, not till the family wrote to say that they would visit next month. And now she thinks they killed her sister there.'

'Did they kill her?' whispered Heidi.

'No, of course not. Of course they didn't,' said Frau Mundt, just a bit too firmly. 'Freya has just been listening to stories — silly stories, you know how people talk. But sometimes, sometimes things like that have to happen. It's for the good of everyone. We cannot have weaklings in the new German race. People like Freya's sister mustn't be allowed to have children. It is like with the Jews.'

'What are Jews?' asked Heidi. The word was familiar — she'd heard it before. She'd even read it in

Duff's book, the big, boring one that Fräulein Gelber kept on the mantelpiece and made her read a page from each day.

The book talked about the 'Jewish problem' but Heidi had never known quite what it meant.

Frau Mundt bit her lip. 'You should ask Fräulein Gelber about that. But it is all nonsense what they say. Nonsense. The Jews are simply being sent to work, that's all. The Jews are rich, everyone knows that. It's time they were made to work. Come on now, hurry upstairs.'

Later, during their walk, she asked Fräulein Gelber: 'Fräulein Gelber, who are the Jews?'

Fräulein Gelber scarcely hesitated in her stride. 'The Jews are different. They are different from us. That is why the Führer wants to separate them. So they can't endanger the lifeblood of the German people, so they can't weaken it.'

'What happens to them?'

'They are sent to camps. Places to work.' She looked at her sharply. 'Who has been telling you about the Jews?'

'No one. Well, Frau Mundt. But she said I was to ask you.'

'Well, I've told you. They are different from us. That's why they have to be sent away.'

'Are there any Jews near here?'

'No, of course not. But if one did escape and come near here, the guards would catch them and send them back. There is no need to worry.'

'I'm not worried,' said Heidi.

Anna's voice stopped.

'But what happened then?' demanded Mark. 'Go on!'

Little Tracey nudged him. 'The bus,' she said. 'Come on. The bus's here.'

chapter five

Mark Wonders

It was only a story, Mark told himself that night after dinner. Just a story, nothing more. It wasn't true — but there were true things in it.

Maybe that's what puzzled him, Mark decided. None of Anna's other stories had had true things in them before.

The creek bubbled and twisted, brown and muddy in the growing dark just like the thoughts inside him. Mark could see it from the lounge room window, and from his bedroom. You could even smell it from the house: year-old wombat droppings and cow shush, and rotten leaves and bark, all brewed up together like that herbal tea stuff Mum sometimes drank and Dad would never touch.

When he was younger Mark used to watch the

down them on a raft. He'd float right out to sea perhaps and then along the coast, or maybe out to an island with palm trees and white sand.

But of course any raft would be torn to bits in the flood. You'd be drowned in a whirlpool or snagged by a log. It was fun to pretend though. Sometimes pretending could feel real.

And some of Anna's story *was* real. The bits about Hitler, and the Jews.

'Dad?'

'Mmm?' Dad didn't quite look up from the pamphlet he was reading about a new cattle drench.

'Mark, if it's trigonometry, ask your mum. You know what I'm like at maths.'

'No, it's not homework. I was just wondering.'

'Just let me finish this bit will you ... wondering what?'

'Why Hitler was so down on the Jews,' said Mark in a rush.

Dad blinked and put the pamphlet down. 'What brought this on?'

'Oh, just something at school,' said Mark. Which was true in a way, he reflected.

'No idea,' said Dad, glancing down at his pamphlet again then looking dutifully back up at Mark. 'How about asking Mrs Holster at school?'

Mrs Holster was the school librarian.

'Okay,' said Mark, disappointed.

Dad looked at him a bit helplessly. 'It wasn't just the Jews he killed,' he said. 'It was anyone who disagreed with him, too. That all you wanted to know?'

Mark shook his head, thinking. 'Dad?'

'Yes?' asked Dad, a bit warily.

'If you were Hitler ...'

'If I was *who*?' Dad began to laugh.

'No, Dad, I'm serious. If you did things like Hitler did — really bad things — what do you think I should do?'

Dad looked at him more sharply. 'You mean, should you go along with me because I'm your father, no matter what?'

'Yeah, that's about it,' said Mark.

'I don't know,' said Dad slowly. He put his paper down, as though for once he was seriously trying to answer Mark's question. 'I suppose I'd want you to do what you thought was right.'

'But ...' Dad hesitated, then went on. 'If we do ever disagree about things, I hope we'll still be able to talk about it. Still meet and be a family, no matter how much we argue.'

'Okay,' said Mark.

'Does that answer your question?'

'I don't know,' said Mark truthfully. 'Hey, what would you do if I was a mass murderer? You know, chopped them up with a chainsaw or something.'

'Stop your pocket money,' said Dad, grinning. 'And I'll tell you straight, kid — you murder one more person and there'll be no television for a fortnight. And if you try burying the bodies under your mum's roses I'll send you to your room. And you'd better clean the blood off my good chainsaw too.'

'No — really.'

'Dunno,' said Dad, serious again. 'Try to work out why you did it. Be sad for you. Be sad for your victims. Try to get help for you. Wonder how your mother and I failed you.'

'Would you turn me into the police?'

'Yes,' said Dad slowly. 'I suppose I'd have to. That's a hell of a question, Mark.'

'Would you still love me? No matter what I did? Even if I killed hundreds and hundreds of people?'

'Yes, of course we would, you dingbat. Or maybe we'd love you in a different way. What's brought all this on anyway?'

'Oh, nothing,' said Mark.

chapter six

Anna Continues

The rain chattered onto the ground, and dribbled along the wet barbed wire round Harrison's paddock till it trickled down in short ploppy streams. It seemed even louder in the bus shelter.

The cows chomped sadly at the wet grass. Today the air was still, so the rain fell straight and clear.

'It's never going to stop,' said Mark. 'It's going to go on and on and we'll have to get a boat to school and all the cars will float away ...'

'Really?' asked Little Tracey, wide-eyed.

'No, of course not really,' said Mark. 'Hey Anna I was wondering. Have you told anyone else this story? The Hitler one?'

'No,' said Anna shortly. 'It's just between us.'

'Oh,' said Mark, vaguely pleased.

'Are you going to tell us more?' Little Tracey bounced up and down.

'If you like,' said Anna.

It was soon after Heidi had asked Fräulein Gelber about the Jews that they had to move house.

'Why do we have to go?' asked Heidi, half scared and half excited.

Fräulein Gelber waved a letter, typewritten, with a sprawling signature at the bottom, but too quickly for Heidi to read what it said.

'From Duffi?' asked Heidi.

Fräulein Gelber shrugged, as though to say that all orders came eventually from Duffi, but this letter was from someone else.

'Where will we go?' asked Heidi.

Fräulein Gelber told her. The name meant nothing to Heidi.

'We will look it up on the map this afternoon,' said Fräulein Gelber. 'It will be a nice place. You will like it.'

'But WHY do we have to go?'

'It will be safer there,' said Fräulein Gelber, but she didn't say for whom. She smiled. 'It is much nearer my family,' she added. 'Only two, three hours away by bicycle.'

'Will they visit us?' asked Heidi eagerly.

Sometimes Fräulein Gelber had let Heidi read her mother's letters or her sister's, or even her brother's, as a treat. Her father had died, many years before, and that was why Fräulein Gelber had to work. He had been a friend of Duffi's.

But Fräulein Gelber had told her often that it was an honour to work in the Führer's household. 'I could have married,' she had explained to Heidi. 'I have had ... oh, several offers. Several men have pleaded with me to marry them.'

'Why didn't you?' asked Heidi, hoping that Fräulein Gelber would say, 'I didn't want to leave you.'

But instead she said, 'To give up my work, after all the Führer has done for us? That I couldn't do.'

'I don't think they will visit,' said Fräulein Gelber now, in a voice that told Heidi not to ask why.

Suddenly a thought occurred to her. 'Will Duffi be at the new house?'

Perhaps that was why they were going, so they could be with Duffi. Maybe Duffi missed her. Maybe he had said ...

'No, of course not,' said Fräulein Gelber. 'He is in Berlin.'

'But will he visit?'

'Vielleicht. Perhaps,' said Fräulein Gelber.

Other people packed for them. Heidi only had to pack her dolls and her special books.

Half of her wanted to leave the dolls behind — the pretty, perfect dolls — but Duffi had given them to her and, besides, she'd have had to explain to Fräulein Gelber.

They travelled to the new house by car the next day. Their move must have been arranged even before Fräulein Gelber had been told.

Three soldiers came to help them.

One of the soldiers drove their car, another rode behind on a motorbike, and the other drove the car with their luggage.

Fräulein Gelber didn't know how to drive — most women didn't know how to drive back then, and anyway, the guards were to look after them and make sure nothing happened to them on the way.

It was only an hour's journey, but it was the first time Heidi had ever been in a car. (No, there had been one time before, when Duffi had taken her for a drive. He had pointed out a lake and geese and made her laugh by making the goose noise, but that was so very long ago it was hard to remember.)

She had never been so far before. There was so much that was new to see: the fields that were much like the fields she knew.

brown cows, and once, a pair of goats in an orchard. The goats had climbed up onto a table and were stretching up to eat the trees, and Heidi laughed and pointed them out to Fräulein Gelber.

She would have liked to ask the soldier to stop the car so she could watch the goats, but she had been told already that she was not to talk to him.

No one said why she had to be silent, but she guessed. The driver was not to know who she was.

Suddenly there was a humming, far up in the sky, like bees in the plum blossom, but too sharp to be bees. The humming deepened, closer and closer, and then engines could be heard.

The driver glanced at Fräulein Gelber, then pulled the car in under a tree, so they couldn't be seen from the air. The car behind pulled in close to the hedge, and so did the motorbike driver.

'Bomber,' said the driver briefly.

The enemy plane seemed to come slowly, slowly, slowly; then suddenly the plane was almost above them, and coming fast.

'Perhaps we should get out and lie on the ground, just in case they see the car,' said Fräulein Gelber nervously.

'Too late,' said the driver. 'They'd see us move.'

Would they hear the sound of a bomb falling before it hit their car and killed them, Heidi thought in sudden terror?

Fräulein Gelber pulled her back, as though just seeing the plane might make her more vulnerable, but Heidi caught a glimpse of it anyway, too high up to make much out, and then there was its black shadow flying across the grass beyond the trees.

How could death come so quickly over the trees? wondered Heidi. She watched the shadow till it was out of sight, and the engine noise had faded to humming again.

Fräulein Gelber took her hand. Fräulein Gelber's hand was damp and clammy, and shaking, too. The driver started the car, and they drove off again.

More trees and fields, and once, a village, with a church at one end of the square and a cafe at the other, with no bomb damage at all that Heidi could see, except for one house on the outskirts, half ruined, and the windows filled up with cardboard instead of glass.

'Stray bomb, probably,' said the driver, nodding at it. 'Sometimes they have a few spare that they haven't dropped on targets and they drop them anywhere, so that they don't use up so much fuel carrying them back home.'

Home was England. England was the enemy. Sometimes Heidi wondered what it must be like to be English. Were they evil people or just stupid? How could they possibly win against all of Germany, against Duffi. It was such a little island on the map.

The road twisted out of the village, past a farm, and then another, with pigs rolling in the fresh black mud, and then down another road, past two ancient oak trees like giant dark umbrellas across the road, and they were there.

The new house was small, or at least it seemed so to Heidi after the big house where she'd lived before. It crouched under the trees like it, too, was hiding from the bombs.

But it had three bedrooms upstairs (narrow twisting wooden stairs): one bedroom was for Heidi and one was for Fräulein Gelber. The third was to be their schoolroom, where all their books would go. It had a big kitchen with a cold, paved floor and an even bigger cellar that you got to by going out the kitchen door and down some steps.

Fräulein Gelber inspected the cellar thoroughly. She didn't say why, but Heidi knew that the cellar was where they would go if enemy planes flew overhead. Bombs might crush the house, but the cellar would be safe.

The cellar smelled sweet and musty. It had bins of apples stored in old dried leaves, and shelves with jars of jam and sauerkraut and honey, and cabbages all in a pile and two sacks of potatoes with just a few taken out of one, and a sack of golden onions, their skins floating off like yellow autumn leaves.

'Where are the people who lived here before?' asked Heidi, but Fräulein Gelber couldn't say.

'That's none of our business,' she said, though Heidi thought it was. It seemed odd to be wandering through rooms that other people had lived in not long ago eating their onions and plum jam, and then not even to know what they'd been like or where they were now.

Only Heidi and Fräulein Gelber were to live in the house. Sergeant Amchell lived in the barn.

He was old, with a long salt and pepper moustache that looked like it would fall out if he blew his nose too hard. He had been wounded in the leg in the last war, so he limped just like Heidi.

She hoped he'd notice that she limped, too, and maybe joke about it — the two of them with only two good legs between them — or something friendly like that, but he kept to himself and tended the giant cabbages in the garden instead of standing to attention at the door like the other guards she'd known. Mostly

he pretended he didn't see her when she smiled at him, or hear her when she said '*Guten Morgen*'.

He was the only guard they had now.

The first night in the new house Fräulein Gelber lit the candles and sat her on one of the hard dark chairs in the sitting room.

'A woman will be coming tomorrow to cook the food, and to look after the house,' said Fräulein Gelber. 'Her name is Frau Leib. She is just a farm woman, but I want you to be polite to her, even so.'

'Of course,' said Heidi.

Fräulein Gelber hesitated. 'Frau Leib has been told you are my niece, the child of my sister who was killed in the air raids.'

Heidi looked up. 'Was your sister killed in the air raids?' she asked in alarm.

Fräulein Gelber's sister was married and lived three streets away from her mother. She had sent Fräulein Gelber a scarf last Christmas. Heidi had secretly hoped that one day someone from Fräulein Gelber's family might send her a present too, but they never did. Perhaps Fräulein Gelber had never mentioned Heidi in her letters. Or maybe they thought she had everything she needed and didn't need presents.

'No, of course not,' said Fräulein Gelber. 'My sister is quite well, apart from a slight case of grippe

last month. But it's best if that's what Frau Leib continues to believe.'

Fräulein Gelber hesitated again. 'I don't want you speaking too much to her, you understand?'

'I understand,' said Heidi.

chapter seven

Frau Leib

The rain pounded on the roof of the bus shelter like it couldn't wait to get down from the sky. One of the cows moaned softly, a sad, wet complaint about life in general.

'Go on,' urged Mark.

'The bus,' said Anna.

Mark looked at his watch.

'We've got another five minutes at least,' he said.

'Go on!'

Anna took another breath, and began the story again.

Frau Leib had grey hair, not speckled grey like Fräulein Gelber's — whose hair looked a bit like a hen's feathers, Heidi thought sometimes — but grey all over like a saucepan, and tight curls that looked